



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 8**

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February 1, 2012

Mr. John H. Wright  
1872 Hwy 110  
P.O. Box 308  
Silverton, CO 81433

RE: 9-12-11 e-mail "EPA Superfund in  
San Juan County

Dear Mr. Wright:

Thank you for your September 12, 2011 email regarding Upper Cement Creek.

Your letter identifies concerns that are commonly raised by communities when the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is evaluating an area for the National Priorities List (NPL). We'd like to assure you that the EPA has not made a decision concerning listing of the Upper Cement Creek area. The decision to propose a site for the NPL can only be made after a technical evaluation is completed to determine if the site is NPL eligible. The EPA is just completing this technical evaluation. In addition, both the State and the EPA seek community support prior to a site being proposed for listing and the EPA wants the community to understand why we are looking at this option.

More than 15 years ago the EPA committed to a community-based environmental protection effort in San Juan County, and indicated that Superfund would not be used as long as progress was being made in improving water quality in the Animas River. Unfortunately, water quality has significantly degraded in the Animas River in the last five years. It is evident that historic mine waste in Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River, is having a negative impact on the Animas. These impacts are likely related to cessation of water treatment in Gladstone and plugging of the American Tunnel. The EPA has compared the last five years of data to earlier data sets that indicated improvements in water quality. The Animas River Stakeholder Group (ARSG) has summarized some of these data and the EPA is also evaluating these data. If experience in other mining impacted areas is any guide, the resources required for solutions to this sort of problem will be substantial, and long-term operation and maintenance of the solution or solutions may be required.

EPA is working with other federal agencies, the State, and local community members to identify options to reverse the degradation and improve water quality in the Animas River. It is too soon to make conclusions about how best to correct this condition. However, if the best solutions require substantial and long-term resources, CERCLA process and the NPL may be the only means to assure that full resources available to the EPA can be committed. EPA is also limited in its ability to fund interim

actions and long-term projects that require ongoing operations and maintenance.

The EPA looks forward to continuing the dialogue with you and other community members regarding possible options to address water quality issues in Upper Cement Creek. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact me at 303-312-6607.

Sincerely,

Michael Holmes  
Project Manager